Report by Michael Chau A/Manager Community Services

RECOMMENDATION

That the report concerning Internet Kiosk for Seniors be noted.

PURPOSE OF REPORT

Council, at its meeting on 3 March 2009, resolved (Minute No.77/09):

"That Strathfield Council resolves, in principle, to express interest in hosting an Internet kiosk, and that Council authorises the General Manager to prepare a report to Council accordingly".

This report is in response to this resolution.

REPORT

Council currently provides equitable access by the community to the internet through 16 public access terminals in the main library. Additional terminals will be available in the new High Street Community Library.

Studies indicate that persons such as seniors, who are usually not in employment or attending school or university, have less familiarity and exposure to the internet and computers in general. Therefore, they may require assistance and training. To address this issue, Council operates Seniors Computer classes which aim to provide basic skills and knowledge to enable independent use of the internet. These classes have been on-going since October 2006 and interest has been high in joining them. From May 2009, additional classes will be held to cater for growing demand.

Use of the Internet as a conduit for communicating, accessing information and undertaking commerce has increased significantly in the last decade. Australians are embracing this technology rapidly as use of the internet is expanding every year. In the Strathfield community, use of internet is significant across all demographic groups. Internet services are accessed from homes, workplaces or from using public terminals provided by Council's Library service.

The number of dwellings in Strathfield LGA with an internet connection is relatively high. As reported in the 2006 Census, nearly 70% of dwellings were connected to the Internet. This was 5% higher than the Sydney average. There has been a substantial increase in home connections to the Internet since the 2001 Census.

Of those dwellings connected to the internet 77% had broadband connection while 22% of dwellings still used dial up connection. The broadband connection rate is significantly higher than the Sydney average where only 48% were connected to the faster broadband.

Across all housing types those dwelling types without connection to the Internet were similar in numbers with 25% for separate houses, 27% for semi detached and townhouses and 28% for flats and units. However "other dwellings" rated at 39%.

Council is required under State Library of NSW policy to provide access to public terminals to all members of the community free of charge. Providing dedicated access to a specific group and excluding others from access may impinge on Council's obligations to provide equitable access to library resources. Access is provided to all members of Strathfield Library, who make a booking and accept terms and conditions of use.

In view of Council's current program concerning Seniors Computing classes and the resources currently available in the main library, together with the resources to be provided in the branch library, it is considered that a dedicated Internet Kiosk for Seniors is not required.

REFERRAL FROM OTHER DEPARTMENT

Information provided by the Manager Library and Information Services has been included in the report.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no financial implications.

Report approved by:

Neale Redman
Director Corporate Services